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RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 1201  
RUEHNR/AMEMBASSY NAIROBI 0507  
RUEHNM/AMEMBASSY NIAMEY 2479  
RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS 1588  
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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 03 NDJAMENA 000360

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SUBJECT: EASTERN CHAD: ABSENCE OF CHADIAN FORCES  
EXACERBATES BANDITRY

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¶1. (U) SUMMARY. A security void caused by the repositioning of Chadian police and military forces since December is the principal factor in the increased raiding and looting in the border area south of Adre. First-hand accounts by refugees arriving from these areas and assessments by senior staff from international humanitarian organizations indicate that Sudanese and Chadian Arabs have operated in the absence of security forces to engage in heightened raids. The affected Chadian populations have responded by regrouping into larger villages and organizing militias for self-defense and counterattacks. This increased banditry does not bear the hallmarks of government-sponsored Janjaweed attacks which some observers have alleged is being "imported" into Chad. Additional donor funding for humanitarian assistance to Chadian internally displaced persons (IDPs) is not warranted at this time. Banditry and carjacking north of Adre continue to be a major concern for refugee assistance programs. End Summary.

¶2. (U) PRM/AFR Neil Ahlsten (Chad/Darfur Program Officer) traveled to Abeche and eight refugee camps in eastern Chad from February 17 to March 3 to review security and assistance programs for 205,000 Sudanese refugees from Darfur. The present report focuses on security issues in eastern Chad, while septel focuses on refugee assistance programs. Ahlsten did not travel to Adre or Goz Beida, but did interview senior humanitarian staff with a close knowledge of the IDP situation along the Chad/Sudan border and Sudanese refugees who recently arrived from the affected areas.

The Wild East: Arab Bandits and Chadian Militias

¶3. (U) Since the beginning of the year, numerous Chadian villages have been attacked in cross-border raids near Goungour (35km south of Adre) and Borota (70km south of Adre).

The assailants are small groups of Sudanese or Chadian Arabs engaging in opportunistic looting of cattle, food stocks and other assets from the local Chadian population. The organizations treating victims of the attacks, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and Medecins Sans Frontieres, France (MSF/France), indicated that only a small fraction of the villagers are wounded or killed in the attacks. The casualties are normally those who actively resisted the assailants. This increased banditry does not bear the hallmarks of government-sponsored Janjaweed attacks which some observers have alleged is being "imported" into Chad.

¶4. (U) According to UNHCR's figures from mid-February, there are a total of 18,700 Chadian IDPs along various stretches of the Chad/Sudan border between Adre and Goz Beida. In January and February up to 7,000 Chadians were displaced, including 3,200 near Goungour and 3,500 near Borota. The bulk of the affected population is the group of 12,000 Chadian IDPs in areas around Modoina and Koloy (which lie between Ade and Goz Beida) who were displaced in 2005 by cross-border acts of banditry from Sudanese Arabs. Because of the insecurity, up to 2,000 Sudanese refugees from Darfur who were living in host Chadian communities south of Adre have also moved to Gaga refugee camp.

¶5. (SBU) The concentration of Chadian military forces at Adre has emptied nearly all of the gendarmaries along the border and exposed the Chadian population to opportunistic raids.

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A significant number of the Chadian IDPs were in fact never attacked. Instead, as a preemptive measure in the absence of security forces, they moved themselves and their assets a few kilometers from their homes to regroup in larger villages. ICRC, MSF, and the International Federation of the Red Cross (IFRC) report that a Masalit militia has formed in areas south of Adre to provide self-defense for the local population. They also report that elements of the Masalit militia have crossed the Chad/Sudan border to attack Arab populations in Sudan in retribution for acts of banditry, which in turn has elicited further attacks from the Arab populations.

¶6. (U) ICRC has taken the lead in providing humanitarian assistance to these IDPs. According to its assessments, a significant amount of assistance is not warranted at this time. ICRC has distributed non-food items and is coordinating with MSF to provide primary health care and monitor the nutritional status of the IDPs. Food aid is not necessary at this time because most households have been able to preserve food stocks following a bumper harvest in November and December. Since the distance of displacement was usually only a few kilometers, most IDPs will have access to their fields in 2006. IDP leaders have dissuaded ICRC from distributing tents out of concern that it would make their villages more attractive to looters.

¶7. (U) In addition to the IDPs noted above, the World Food Program (WFP) has identified 1,200 Chadians who fled border areas near Goz Beida and traveled two hundred miles to the town of Mongo in the district of Guera. A WFP assessment mission in the week of February 27 - March 3 found that this population was originally from the Guera area, but had moved to locations along the Chad/Sudan border roughly forty years ago. With the rise in insecurity along the border, the population decided to return to its area of origin.

¶18. (U) Since December, armed groups have carjacked or stolen nine humanitarian vehicles and briefly detained numerous staff members such as the WFP chief of mission for eastern Chad and the UNHCR head of field office for Guereda. The most recent attack against humanitarians occurred in the town of Iriba at 4pm on March 1st, when four uniformed armed men forced entry into the compound of Medecins Sans Frontieres, Luxembourg, stole a vehicle at gunpoint and headed east toward Sudan. The authorities were notified within a few minutes of the theft but were unable to intercept the vehicle, which was recovered the following day where it had been abandoned a few kilometers from the Sudan border. The attackers were wearing Chadian military uniforms and are suspected to be deserters. No one has been apprehended in conjunction with any of the nine vehicle incidents. Many humanitarian workers believe that local government officials know who is responsible for the attacks but do not wish to respond because it is an internal Zaghawa affair. In some cases, the extended family members of local authorities are rumored to be responsible for the attacks.

¶19. (SBU) Insecurity to the east of Guereda and Iriba is colored by the presence of Chadian rebel group "SCUD." Senior staff from the NGO CARE believe that the town of Moudre (35km east of Guereda and 15 kilometers west of Am Nabak Camp) is under the control of SCUD forces. They are in close contact with village leaders, who have advised them over the past weeks not to pass through the area.

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¶10. (U) UN agencies have repeatedly asked the Government of Chad (GoC) to take concrete action to reduce the threat posed to humanitarian workers and assets. Thus far, signals from the GoC have been mixed. In a meeting with the UNHCR Deputy Representative on February 23, the Governor of Biltine said that he was not able to guarantee security for humanitarian staff, particularly in the area of Am Nabak Camp. The following week, the sous-prefet of Guereda indicated to UNHCR that President Deby supported the addition of 150 gendarmes to the area, some of whom would monitor checkpoints along the roads leading to Am Nabak. Local authorities are also saying that they will need material support from UNHCR fuel in particular, in order to provide this kind of support.

¶11. (U) In a meeting with Ambassador Wall on Saturday, March 4, UNHCR Assistant High Commissioner Judy Chang-Hopkins and Representative Ana Liria-Franch asked if the US could provide vehicles and fuel to Chadian gendarmes. Ambassador Wall encouraged UNHCR to continue seeking ways to improve security in partnership with the local authorities. UNHCR may increase its monthly fuel ration to key sous-prefets to address this resource constraint issue. An interagency mission led by the UN Department of Security and Safety will begin a ten-day visit in Chad on March 6 to advise UNHCR on security arrangements for eastern Chad.

¶12. (U) Senior staff from UNHCR and NGOs have made it clear that security must improve in order for them to provide adequate services to refugees in areas north of Adre. Because of multiple attacks against humanitarian vehicles in the Am Nabak area, all services except for water provision were suspended in the camp from February 14 to March 6. The NGO Right to Play has indefinitely suspended its activities in eastern Chad. Other NGOs are considering significant reductions in activities if the GoC is not able to provide more significant security guarantees in the coming weeks.

¶13. (U) Tripoli Minimize Considered.  
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